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SUBJECT: YOUTH WING OF MALI'S LARGEST PARTY ELECTS NEW OFFICERS

¶1. On January 23-24, the youth wing of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) held its third general congress in Bamako, with 250-300 delegates in attendance. By way of background, ADEMA is the party of former Malian President Alpha Oumar Konare and is the largest in the National Assembly. ADEMA leads most of the other parties (except for the now much-diminished former majority party Rassemblement pour le Mali) in supporting the current President Amadou Toumani Toure.

¶2. The ADEMA youth congress elected Lazare Tembely as the new president of the youth wing's 71 member Executive Board, replacing long-time president Fakoroba Coulibaly who was stepping down because of age. Tembely, a high school geography teacher and communal councilor in Senou, was elected by consensus after ADEMA's president, Dioncounda Traore, intervened the week prior to the congress and convinced Sidi Dagnoko, Tembely's opponent for the youth wing presidency, to withdraw his candidacy. Dagnoko was afforded the position of first vice president for his willingness to withdraw his candidacy for president.

¶3. The congress brought to the forefront disagreements between the youth wing and the senior leadership of the party. For some time, the youth wing has fought for a greater role within the party, seeking financial autonomy and greater influence on decision making. In his speech to the congress on January 23, party president and President of the National Assembly Dioncounda Traore made clear the party was unwilling to make those concessions. On the contrary, Traore presented his view of the youth wing as nothing more than a "school for the party" that was subordinate to the senior leadership and answerable to its directives. Specifically, Traore reminded his young audience that being a member of the youth wing did not make one a member of the party, and that the youth needed to toe the line while waiting their turn.

¶4. Although Traore's comments may have alienated some of the young delegates, most appeared to understand the context of the party president's comments. One delegate from Bankass told the Embassy on January 24 that Traore's intervention in the executive board election was justified because it was essential for ADEMA to present a united front moving into the 2012 elections. Other speakers at the congress recalled the party's fratricidal divisions in 2002 and 2007 and said the youth's highest priority was maintaining party cohesion so that there would be only one ADEMA candidate for the 2012 Malian presidential elections. As Traore himself told the Congress, "History shows us that when we are united, we win. It is only when we are divided that we lose."

¶5. Comment: The youth wings of Malian political parties are important because they do most of the grassroots campaigning.

To that end, Traore's intervention to maintain cohesion in the youth organization is indicative of ongoing efforts to keep the notoriously fractious party together in the run-up to the 2012 elections. With memories of 2002 and 2007 still lingering in their minds, most of the youth wing will likely accept the senior leadership's strong oversight, condescending though Traore's speech may have been. End Comment.

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